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Liberation Theology and Zombies: Paralysis and Praxis

Abstract

In Fredric Jameson's formulation it may now be 'easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism'. What Jameson suggests is that our current preoccupation with the drama of the apocalyptic belies a deeper paralysis of the imagination, and with this the concomitant loss of actions conducive to a new politics.

Jameson's comments here foreground a contradiction in our experience of late capitalism, representations of dramatic rupture which obscure fundamental political stasis. This paper takes Jameson's reflections and the contradiction of action which is also non-action as the point of departure to query the current state of Liberation Theology, particularly the work of Ivan Petrella, to defend the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and ask how our contemporary predicament might be illuminated by Danny Boyle's Zombie film, '28 Days Later'.

Keywords: Liberation Theology, Zombies, Teratology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Late Capitalism Culture Industry

Introduction

In this paper I argue that Danny Boyle's film '28 Days Later' can be used to open up the tradition of Liberation Theology in a number of important ways. In particular, I focus on the relationship of action (praxis) to the future (apocalypse).¹ Reflecting on the production and reception of Boyle's film within the late-capitalist cultural context in which it was produced, I ask how Boyle's film is convergent or dissonant with the first generation of Liberation Theologians', particularly Gustavo Gutiérrez's, vision of the future.

In an article on 'the contribution that theology might make to the consideration of our common future', the Cambridge based Roman Catholic theologian Nicholas Lash suggests that our culture is simultaneously too optimistic and pessimistic. 'We' oscillate between a sense of ecologically fatalistic 'there is no escape' and economic 'there is no alternative' (T.I.N.A.)

¹ Taking the apocalyptic not as a 'literary genre that introduces the meaning of history as divine destiny unfolding in time' but as a film genre concerned with 'progress' and 'catastrophe', the 'overturning of a given situation.' Stefan Skrimshire, 'The End of the Future: Hegel and the Political Ecology of Deep Time', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 62 (2011), pp. 325–338., at. p. 326. Aris Mousoutzanis, 'Apocalyptic Sci Fi', in. Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, Sherryl Vint, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 458–462, at. p. 458.

despair and ‘the mythical conviction that modern industrial society, with “its thinking in categories of economic growth, its understanding of science and technology and its forms of democracy”, represents a “pinnacle” of human achievement “which it scarcely makes sense even to consider surpassing.”’² Theology gestures, Lash contends, beyond despair and optimism to a complex disposition within the world called ‘hope’, and it is the theological rationale for hopefulness in the face of seemingly intractable poverty that this paper explores.³

In the 1990s, the Marxist social critic and cultural analyst Fredric Jameson asked whether under the current conditions it is ‘easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism’?⁴ Reflecting on this quote in his book *The Already Dead*, Eric Cazdyn says that Jameson neatly ‘revealed the depoliticized nature of late capitalist societies, always lulled by the latest blockbuster dystopia as a way to stay asleep to the actually existing possibilities of radical change.’⁵ The ‘dialectic shock of this statement seems to have worn off’, Cazdyn continues, and Jameson’s observation is no longer funny ‘because the end of the world *is* a more likely scenario than the end of capitalism. Sadly, capitalism might very well be the last mode of production during human history.’⁶ Cazdyn, drawing on Jameson’s work on late capitalism, names our current condition ‘the new chronic’. The new chronic is ‘a new mode of time... an undying present that remains forever sick, without the danger of sudden death. The maintenance of the status quo becomes, if not quite our ultimate goal, what we will settle for, and even fight for.’⁷ If we are all ‘sick’ and yet ‘undying’ (zombie?) then maintenance, not

² Lash is quoting Ulrich Beck. Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of ‘Religion’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 252. Like Lash, this paper intermittently uses the term ‘we’. Initially I use it to refer, as Eric Cazdyn says, to ‘the minority of the world’s population who actually have access to [the] good and services’ that have been made available by late capitalist development. Later in the paper I again refer to ‘we’ or ‘our’, but in the more specific sense of those in developed and underdeveloped countries who continue identify themselves with the tradition of Liberation Theology. Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead* (London: Duke University press, 2012), p. 79.

³ Lash, *Beginning and the End of ‘Religion’*, p. 255, 256.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, ‘Future City’, *New Left Review*, Vol. 21 (May – June 2003), pp. 65–79, at. p. 76. Ola Sigurdson, makes a comparable point when he says that ‘zombies represent the alien *within* us’ for while ‘they confront us with a scenario where human life is threatened’ they should not be understood ‘as a vision of a dystopic future, but instead as an apocalypse of the here-and-now.’ Ola Sigurdson, ‘Slavoj Žižek, The Death Drive, and Zombies: A Theological Account’, *Modern Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 2013), pp. 361–380, at. p. 373.

⁵ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 61.

⁶ Ibid, p. 61.

⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

solution, is liable to become the new norm as ‘the new chronic extends the present into the future... making it seem as if the present will never end.’⁸

Jameson and Cazdyn’s comments open up two avenues for further inquiry. First, whether the apocalyptic genre in film is an opiate of the masses which stifles and curtails radical political action by presenting us alternative futures which are inferior to our current neoliberal, late liberal capitalist arrangement; the dystopia of the future is the inverse of the utopia now. Or, an alternative way of understanding apocalyptically leaning cultural artefacts is to consider them as manifestations of an imminent rather than immanent catastrophe; the dystopia within the current utopia.⁹ If a single film, like Boyle’s ‘28 Days Later’, can be legitimately perceived in both of these ways, then the first conclusion we must draw is that in the same way that our stance towards the future is contradictory (as Lash suggested), our presentations of the future in apocalyptic culture is open to various forms of interpretation and concomitant political stances. What makes Boyle’s film interesting, I argue, is that it both embodies and refuses the resolution of our contradictory current situation. Moving on from the question of a shared vision of the future, Boyle’s film explores not only utopia and dystopia but the relationship of action (how actions presume and project horizons of meaning and fulfilment) and inaction (the current lack of a wider horizon or *telos* to action which results in inertia, frenetic busyness or paralysis).¹⁰ Like Cazdyn, I think film may ‘present a way into these questions, a way of posing

⁸ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 7. Cazdyn uses a joke by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek to illustrate this: two security officers are patrolling a city street after a military coup in Poland. ‘The officers have orders to shoot and kill anyone out on the street after 10:00 PM. It is ten minutes to ten and one of the guards sees a man hurrying along and shoots him dead. The other officer, perplexed and worried, turns to his partner and asks why he shot too soon. “I knew the fellow – he lived far from here and in any case would not be able to reach his home in ten minutes, so to simplify matters, I shot him now.”’ Ibid, p. 17. Following the election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States of America, the British comedian Frankie Boyle used a similar joke. He suggested that recent events showed that ‘our civilisation is coming to an end’ and argued that because of the inevitability of the end of humanity we are faced with a choice: ‘we can mope about it, or enjoy the fact that nothing matters any more’. Boyle continues by saying he himself has taken the opportunity to bury ‘a time capsule for the future, and you know what’s in it? A pressure sensitive landmine.’ Frankie Boyle’s American Autopsy. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b083s663/frankie-boyles-american-autopsy>. Accessed 29/11/2016.

⁹ I am indebted here to Stefan Skrimshire for his distinction of the immanent/imminent and his analysis of capitalism as a form of utopia. See Stefan Skrimshire, ‘Another What is Possible? Ideology and Utopian Imagination in Anti-Capitalist Resistance’, *Political Theology*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2006), pp. 201–219, at. p. 204, 207.

¹⁰ The chimera of action obscuring an equally real inaction recurs in a number of theorists, and reflections on late capitalist experience. Widely cited authors like Adorno, Baudrillard, and Benjamin, for example, make comparable points. Adorno, in *The Culture Industry*, says that ‘what parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness; everywhere the changes mask a skeleton which has changed just as little as the

them cinematically before they can be adequately articulated in everyday political life.’¹¹ Furthermore, the ending of Boyle’s film itself was also changed to accommodate audience preferences. Searchlight’s President for distribution, Steve Gilula, said of the change from the death of the protagonist Jim on a hospital bed at the films conclusion (the film also begins with a hospital bed scene) to the survival and salvation of the films protagonist: ‘I think there are people who like pessimism and despair, but there are a lot of people who like hope.’¹² And it is on this question of action, ‘hopeful’ representations of the apocalypse, and political vision that I turn to the tradition of Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology initially emerged in South America in the 1960s and 1970s, though its roots can be traced back to the early twentieth century.¹³ As a critical and engaged theological movement, the first generation of Liberation Theologians’ work revolved around a series of key themes: the place of praxis in the production of theology, the relationship of the person and the non-person (rich and poor), God’s preferential option for the poor, and the rejection of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism.¹⁴ For Gustavo Gutiérrez, a pioneering Roman Catholic theologian from Peru, Liberation Theology is ‘critical reflection on historical *praxis*’, ‘not so much a new theme for reflection as a *new way* to do theology’; theology done with and for the poor.¹⁵

For contemporary theologians sympathetic to aspects of Liberation Theology, like Daniel Bell and Ivan Petrella, the irony of Liberation Theology is that the quintessentially

profit motive itself since the time it first gained its predominance over culture.’ For Baudrillard, ‘the radical irony of our history is that things no longer really take place, while nonetheless seeming to’. And, in his characteristic aphoristic style, Walter Benjamin noted ‘that things “just go on”, is the catastrophe.’ Slightly different sentiments are being expressed by these authors. Nevertheless, a dynamic interaction of furious progress and intractable repetition is being expressed in various ways here in relation to the (non)action of humans. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 100. Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 16. Walter Benjamin, quoted in Aris Mousoutzanis, ‘Apocalyptic Sci Fi’, in: Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, Sherryl Vint, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 458–462, at. p. 458.

¹¹ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 86.

¹² <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/21/movies/critic-s-notebook-even-later-28-days-hedges-its-ending.html>. Accessed, 13/09/2014.

¹³ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ The identification of ‘generations’ of Liberation Theologians is to be found in Mario I. Aguilar, *The History and Politics of Latin American Theology Volume One* (London: SCM Press, 2007). Jon Sobrino, ‘Preface’, in: Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, eds., *Systematic Theology, Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. vii–xi.

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda, John Eagleson (New York: Orbis, 1983), p. 15. Italics in original.

practice based theology has lost its defining modes of political praxis over the course of the last 30 years. Writing in Routledge's Radical Orthodoxy series, Bell claims that Liberation Theology is insufficiently radical because it substantiates a division between public, secular, and self-legitimising politics and private theology, ecclesiology, grace, and faith through its methodological division of the theological task into distinct 'stages'.¹⁶ For the Argentinean theologian Ivan Petrella, the problem is again one of methodology: the hiatus between the 'second step' sociological analysis and the 'third step' theological reflection.¹⁷ Compounded by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 'end of history', the early Liberation Theologians' vision of socialism and their theo-political method are intertwined with their ongoing political failure, or so these authors claim.

Through an allegorical reading of Boyle's film, attentive to the current socio-economic context, my argument is that both Petrella and Bell are too hasty in rejecting the work of theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez, and that their failure to maintain tensions evident in Gutiérrez's work truncates their own theo-political visions of the future. In Part One, I focus on the contradictions of capitalist culture and the frenetic busyness of contemporary political inertia. In Part Two, I put forward a reading of Boyle's film which gives meat to these theoretical bones. Boyle's zombie ('the infected') film develops a series of distinctions, such as the difference of survivor and zombie, action and inaction or progress and repetition, city and country, natural and technological, dystopia and utopia, which I suggest are both constructed and deconstructed as the film progresses. This leads to the third section, in which I return to Petrella and Bell, suggesting a necessarily complex stance for contemporary Liberation Theologians given the contradictions of our current situation; in the conclusion I suggest that this is a stance that is compatible with the developments we can see in Gustavo Gutiérrez's theological work: the launching of Liberation Theology in both action and contemplation.¹⁸

Part One: Capitalism and Culture

¹⁶ D.M. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2, 3, 56–62.

¹⁷ Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. viii.

¹⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: SCM Press, 1984), p. 136.

If there is no alternative, then the possibility of action instigating the new is inevitably foreclosed and action will tend towards repetition. Fredrick Jameson's work is informative here, for Jameson suggests that this particular form of political inertia and absence of the new or different can be seen in the production and dissemination of postmodern culture and the 'structured feelings' it propagates. In *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson presents post-modernism 'as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.'¹⁹ The ahistoricity of the present is integral to Jameson's formulation of post-modernism, of late capitalist experience, and will guide my understanding of '28 Days Later'.

In Jameson's collected works we can see a number of possible causes for this experience of ahistorical present. Jameson sees late capitalist culture, or 'postmodernism', as the co-ordination of 'new forms of practice and social and mental habits...with the new forms of economic production and organisation thrown up by the modification of capitalism...in recent years'²⁰. In an essay called 'The Politics of Utopia' (short answer: there are no politics in utopia), Jameson, I think rightly, notes that socio-political orders prohibit in important ways the imagination of their disintegration, this is the 'fundamental presupposition of all systems'.²¹ Yet capitalism, while it entrenches itself institutionally and internationally (IMF, World Bank) and enamours itself amongst select participants (global and stateless plutocrats, justifying their deserts on the grounds of merit, hard work and social mobility)²², is unnerving in that it 'also requires a frontier, and perpetual expansion, in order to sustain its inner dynamic.'²³ In short, capitalism holds that there is no imaginative or practical alternative, and yet that there are uncommodified practices and objects, and currently unthinkable places, demanding us to maintain both of these variant elements at the same time.

The coexistence of the perceived necessity of capitalism with its equally chimerical limitedness needs to be developed further by considering how it informs our understanding of poverty and the nation. In *The Already Dead*, Cazdyn, while recognising the continuity of the national apparatus and the global economy, also notes their dissonance. He says that we exist

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. ix.

²⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. xiv.

²¹ Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review*, Vol. 25 (Jan – Feb 2004), pp. 35-54, at. p. 43.

²² Chrystia Freeland, *Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

²³ Jameson, 'Politics of Utopia', *New Left*, p. 38.

suspended over a global abyss that ‘forces our institutions and thinking to break down’ because ‘whereas the nation-state demands a certain economic outcome, the global system demands another.’²⁴ Returning to Jameson, this tension also exists within the boundary of the nation, as people oscillate between the pillars of the ‘natural, pure and uncommodified country’ and the ‘progressive, technological, freeing’ place of the city.²⁵ Importantly, either of these locations can be perceived to be, in various degrees, ‘utopian’: either the country offers freedom from the conflict, class and commodities of the city; or, alternatively, it is the city which through access to finance can grant you the full fulfilment of your desires to acquire, purchase and consume. Arguably, the poor are also submerged under the same contradictory logic. The poor have an uncanny status, both internal to the capitalist system which produces poverty when it functions smoothly, and also as a wasteful and yet to be commodified pool of labour. The poor are at once a frontier fit for incorporation and a standing reserve of labour which keep labour wages depressed.²⁶

Like Jameson, Daniel Bell notes a similar contradictory tension in contemporary capitalism and uses Deleuze’s term ‘deterritorialization’ to describe it. For Bell, capitalism depends on and releases human desire, it was

born when decoded flows of desire overwhelm the state’s ability to perform topical conjunctions (tying labour and capital to specific, concrete people, land or things), and flows of unqualified labour encounter flows of unqualified capital.²⁷

Capitalism is the name for that transition to new form of ‘deterritorialization’ in which labour and objects carry value according to abstract, international, and non-placed exchange rates. Why is this or that thing valuable, and how is this value to be adjudicated? According to a number of excel spreadsheets shared and held by a small number of interchangeable global financiers; an “enormous, so-called, stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by states, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a *de facto* supranational power untouched by governmental

²⁴ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 7.

²⁵ Jameson, ‘Politics of Utopia’, *New Left*, p. 48, 49.

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), p. 112. This link is also made in Sara Sutler-Cohen, ‘Plans Are Pointless; Staying Alive Is as Good as It Gets’, in Christopher M. More, Cory James Rushton, eds., *Zombies Are Us: Essays in the Humanity of the Walking Dead* (London: McFarland & Company, 2011), pp. 183–193, at p. 183.

²⁷ Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End*, p. 16.

decisions.”²⁸ But capitalism also includes ‘reterritorialisation’, as bounded imaginative and geographic spaces are organised, partially through state operations, as site for the ‘realization [of] the worldwide capitalist axiomatic.’²⁹ Bell uses Deleuze’s illustration: the capitalist world is a megapolis, and all the different states or nations are locals or neighbourhoods which need not be homogenous because capitalism is capable of ‘traversing diverse social formations simultaneously. It is not wedded to any single mode of production or logic of accumulation’.³⁰

For Jameson, we experience these contradictions through our contemporary culture, not as modern alienated subject, but as fragmented contemporary subject constantly submit to process of de and re-territorialization. For Jameson the ‘subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but “heaps of fragments” and a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and aleatory.’³¹ Jameson draws on Lacan’s account of schizophrenia (not in a clinical sense). He understands schizophrenia ‘as a breakdown in the signifying chain’, in the ‘interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning.’³² The consonance of ‘linguistic malfunction’ and this typology of schizophrenia is twofold, Jameson suggests: ‘first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still, of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutical circle through time.’³³ Jameson continues: ‘If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past,

²⁸ Bell quoting Giles Deleuze. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End*, p. 17.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 17. I disagree with Bell’s presentation of the state as impotent in the face of international capital. While the history of states may be marked this way, to theorise them only in this way, as Bell tends to do, is to foreclose an analysis those real gains that have been won through the mechanisms of the state, to limit the state’s possible future importance, and to fail to adequately account for the continued political contestation, even in the most capitalist societies, over what role the state should play.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 17, 18.

³¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 25.

³² Lacan, who Jameson says moved Oedipal rivalry into ‘Name-of-the-father’ as ‘paternal authority now considered as a linguistic function’, is illuminating to our contemporary disorientation in that ‘meaning’ – generated in the movement from signifier to signifier – is lost when ‘that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap’, then, he says, ‘we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers.’ Ibid, p. 26.

³³ Ibid, p. 26, 27.

present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life.’³⁴ Jameson suggests that capitalism denies us a ‘cognitive map’ in which to place ourselves and define our actions, as well as denying us the coherent voice necessary to express this malcontent.³⁵

Bell, Cazdyn, and Jameson all argue that capitalism drives innovation, incorporates all our worlds, demands our constant action and work but deprives us of ‘place’ and the sense of meaningful action because we cannot place our actions in a cogent whole. The contradiction resides here in capitalism’s demand for constant action, but its denial to us of any understanding of contextualised praxis; of what our acts mean, how they relate to the acts of others, of what counts as a meaningful political act or a communicable sentence. This sentiment can be seen in recent British theo-political analysis; in *Anglican Social Theology* Alan Suggate says that ‘a major reasons for the frenetic pace of modern life may well be our fearful and joyless obsession with utility and control without any adequate sense of the ends of life.’³⁶

Part Two: 28 Days Later

This section reads Boyle’s ‘28 Days Later’ as a film which presents, in theme, structure and re-editing for distribution, a series of contradictions; contradictions which will give substance to the foregoing analysis of political inertia under late capitalist conditions. Focusing on in/action and the relationship of the Zombie to the human, this section moves the paper forward by preparing the ground for a reconstruction of the tradition of Liberation Theology. As the section progresses, Jameson’s reflections on the imagination of utopia and dystopia will be developed in dialogue with Boyle’s film.

³⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 27.

³⁵ The continued usefulness of the ‘lack of cognitive map’ metaphor can be challenged. Cazdyn argues that ‘only a few years ago, an accessible language did not exist to properly articulate what was going on in the world.’ But, Cazdyn continues, the ‘lack of a cognitive map’ does not fully express the current situation and our contemporary condition. He continues: ‘we can cognitively map the system and learn where our coffee comes from, how our shirts are made... Today, it is more about being bought off on the level of conscience, since it is impossible within commodity culture to be clean’, we ‘cannot avoid transgression’. If the problem historically was a forgetfulness about the conditions of production used to produce such and such a commodity, the issue today is that ‘we don’t want to have that commodity, because we know (and don’t want to forget) how it’s made and how the workers are treated. Nevertheless, we cannot conceive of how to get by *without* purchasing it (because we see no alternative option) and we cannot prevent feelings of guilt over our participation in a loathsome system.’ Those who identify with this (a ‘we’ that as Cazdyn points out ‘primarily refers to the minority of the world’s population who actually have access to these good and services’) are those who ‘let ourselves forget the vulnerability of the system precisely so that we can enjoy our purchase knowing that we could not have one otherwise.’ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 95, 79.

³⁶ Malcolm Brown, eds., *Anglican Social Theology* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), p. 34.

In terms of theme, Boyle's film depends on a distinction, set up, subverted and then reasserted, between the purity of the country (nature external to the processes of capitalism?) and the filth of the city. It also, thematically, questions what is continuous and discontinuous across the apocalyptic divide by asking what is 'normal' to the person and to human community more broadly. These questions, which theologians often relate to the field of 'theological anthropology' are also explored in Boyle's film by setting the human, the animal and technological into unstable and *perichoretic* interaction.³⁷ Structurally, the film follows the model of a road trip film, with a small group making their journey across uncertain territory towards a secure, and supposedly, utopian (no infection) final location. However, Boyle's initially intention to suspend a progressive narrative supersession by mirroring the beginnings and ends of the film were seen as too pessimistic and led to a re-shooting of the film's ending. I will conclude by suggesting that this re-shoot resignifies the film in banal ways and collapses, into a morass, the provocative suspension of oppositions that makes '28 Days Later' into an interesting example of late capitalist culture industry.

'28 Days Later' opens by revealing a series of TV screens which depict looped shots of human riots, violence and civil disobedience being imposed on an watching ape. Juxtaposed here are human and animal, technology and nature, but it is the brutality of the human and the civility of the animal (and our experience or complicity with violence as viewers of it that) that is emphasised in these scenes. What kind of activity is it to watch the news, and, while watching the news generates a kind of empirical knowledge, is it formative of action or inertia? The depiction of human violence on TV news is a recurrent feature of the zombie genre and is deployed here as a formative context to situate the film's 'action', as such it warrants further reflection.³⁸

By linking these shots on a loop and presenting them to us as the opening of the film, Boyle's film creates a double sense in the audience: the repetition and continuity of the images suggests a human essence, a fate to repeat violence. Yet, by linking these shoots from Europe, America, and the Middle East, the film separates these shots from their actual political or historical contexts. Simultaneously, we have ahistorical continuity despite geography, and a disconnection, or total discontinuity, between these atrocities and the places in which they

³⁷ Elaine Graham, *Words Made Flesh* (London: SCM Press, 2009), p. 310–328.

³⁸ This can be seen in both the original 'Dawn of the Dead', and its 2004 remake, for example.

occur.³⁹ For Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, the transition from story to story perpetuated in the 24 hours news cycle is better thought of as anti-communication than communication.⁴⁰ For Postman, 'what is happening here is that television is altering the meaning of "being informed" by creating a species of information that might properly be called *disinformation*', by which Postman means: 'misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information – information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads one away from knowing.'⁴¹ 'Our daily news is inert', Postman says, 'consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action.'⁴² Watching '28 Days Later' in the light of Postman's comments, we should ask how the (mis)information of the news is linked to the representation of violence and our understanding of the nature of the human. These opening shots are followed by a group of well meaning political activists breaking into this lab to free the caged animals, but in doing so they release the virus and begin the infection.

Copying John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, the film opens with Jim (Cillian Murphy) waking in a hospital bed. Nature and technology are again reiterated: differentiated and integrated through Jim's dependence and connection to the machines around him. The film moves quickly into the famous shots of an empty London, the force of which is the absence of churlish bankers and busy tourists. The manic pseudo-ordered anarchy of London is emphasised in its non-representation, it is lack which is the subject of these shots; suggesting that everyone rushes so that nothing changes, and change itself is the absence of human activity.

What is depicted in the film's presentation of the norms of city life is mirrored later in the film in a discussion of what counts as normal human action. Briefly, Jim meets Selena (Naomie Harris) and Mark (Noah Huntley) and they travel to Jim's home before meeting with father and daughter Frank (Brendon Gleeson) and Hannah (Megan Burns). Selena, Hannah, Frank and Jim together leave London on a journey to the north, to respond to a radio broadcast that claims to have 'an answer to infection' and a safe place to live. It is during this period of travel that the film presents various forms of harmony. These four characters constitute a kind of caring if unconventional family, and there is one harmonious rural setting which suggests

³⁹ I owe suggestion into a mix of continuity and discontinuity to Neil Postman's reflections in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (York: Methuen, 1987), p. 101.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 107.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 109.

⁴² Ibid, p. 69.

future rest. This period also suggests reconciliation between humans and animals, represented by these key characters watching a free family of horses making their way across the country side. North of Manchester, they find an abandoned road block, Frank gets infected, and the remaining three are saved by a small group of soldiers and taken to a fortified country house.

The new arrivals are celebrated at a dinner party and the film turns to an explicit reflection on one of its recurrent themes: whether human nature transcends, or is interrupted by, the outbreak of infection. One soldier is bullied for his desire for things to go back to 'normal', while a second suggests that even within the life of planet Earth the absence of human life is itself the 'normal'. For Captain West (Christopher Eccleston) 'This is what I've seen in the four weeks since infection: people killing people. Which is much what I saw in the four weeks before infection, and the four weeks before that, and before that, and as far back as I care to remember. People killing people. Which, to my mind, puts us in a state of normality right now.'

West's pessimism is a forewarning of the brutality he is willing to show to 'survive' and maintain the integrity of his group, and a reminder of the film's opening shots of ape, animality and violence. Here expressed succinctly is Jameson's thesis: that we are not 28 days later, sundered from the film's events temporally, but members of this same 'normal' in which murder, the most radical of ends, is our measure of there being no ends at all; at the 'end of history' but, equally, at the 'end of there being an end of history'.⁴³ Or, as Selene says: 'Plans are pointless. Staying alive is as good as it gets.' Here is Jameson again: it is best to characterise our present as 'a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here. The problem is then how to locate radical difference; how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia.'⁴⁴

Boyle's first ending to the film has Jim die in a hospital bed, and the two remaining women walking out of the hospital into the light: the beginning repeats the end, using the same setting and depending on the same cinematography and exposure of Jim's body. Coming from and returning to this same point, Boyle's film leaves the action of the central part of the film broadly meaningless (the central characters have made little or no progress). Boyle thought that the two women were going to live, and that it was Selena's willingness to be vulnerable and

⁴³ This is based on Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 4.

⁴⁴ Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left*, p. 76.

responsible to the living (Hannah) which was ‘progressive’ in the film’s narrative arch, but early viewers felt that Hannah and Selena walking down the hospital corridor were going to their inevitable death. As the executive Gilula said, the audience wanted ‘hope’, so the ending was re-shot and re-signified in a series of way deeply at odds with the dominant thrust of the film thus far. In this new ending, a series of re-signified motifs are deployed: we get shots of unadulterated natural purity; the peace of the British cottage; the gendered but unalienated labour of domestic work; the innocence and security of childhood; and external, technologically mediated, intervention (a saviour in a fighter jet) when a repeated feature of this film has been the denial of externality.⁴⁵ As the acerbic, late film critic Rodger Ebert said of this unsatisfying ending: ‘my imagination is just diabolical enough that when that jet fighter appears toward the end, I wish it had appeared, circled back – and opened fire.’⁴⁶ As a whole, ‘28 Days Later’ offers little ground for ‘hope’, its plausibility is premised on the high price paid in the maintenance of the mundane. So the audience too betrays itself? In our desire for a representation of ‘the end of times’ which is true to the brutality of the human, and yet functions to quietly reassure us that ‘it all ends well’?

Finally, we need to explore Boyle’s presentation of the zombie. Boyle’s film never uses the term ‘zombie’, the running dead of Boyle’s film are termed ‘the infected’. First, the infected are identified with animals in Boyle’s film. Captain West chains an infected in the backyard of the aforementioned country house like a dog. The indeterminacy of the animal/infected is also evident in the ambiguity of the infected/human. The chained infected just mentioned inadvertently saves the film’s protagonists and Jim appears as a zombie, covered in human blood, at the film’s dramatic climax. Reflecting on the identification of many zombie fans with the zombie itself in ‘zombiewalks’⁴⁷ Cazdyn suggests, in line with the above analysis, that the human identification with the zombie maybe in part ‘resistance to the human itself – to the human as separate from not only animals and other living creatures but from the planet.’⁴⁸ Here is Cazdyn again: ‘the zombie film allegorizes how the collective of the modern nation (with the United States as the paradigmatic case), in order to sustain itself and manage its own contradictions, required a homicidal other to fight against. And the real horror is that the

⁴⁵ The trustworthy Selena reports that the last radio and television shows had recounted outbreaks of the virus in Paris and New York, rendering the last shots, shown above, thematically inconsistent and at variance with the story’s narrative so far.

⁴⁶ <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/28-days-later-2003>. Accessed 03/01/2017.

⁴⁷ Zombiewalking is a recent phenomena in which fans of the genre dress as zombies and process through the streets collectively.

⁴⁸ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, p. 201.

collective itself produces this enemy, by the very social system that brought the collective into being. The unrepresentable, therefore, is that one cannot have the modern nation without violence, which is in radical contrast to the nation's own fundamental narrative that understands its resort to violence as a response to the transgressive acts of others.⁴⁹ The zombie must be understood as potentially both distant other and uncanny same, for there is continuity and discontinuity 'between a zombiewalker and an average commuter', or zombies and the poor.⁵⁰ The zombie/infected is an indeterminate allegory in Boyle's film: both a total other which reduces human life to survival and an extension of the human proclivity to experiment, consume and destroy.

However, the provocative suggestiveness of the film is hidden in its ending. Jameson notes that in the history of utopian fiction 'one of the most durable oppositions... was that between the country and the city', with the country representing nostalgia, organic growth, nature, and the rural commune and the city the place of planning, technology, and sexual liberty.⁵¹ While the majority of the film defers on the allocation of purity/sin to the city/country respectively (arguably, the obvious but egalitarian brutality and degradation of the city is more comforting than the class hierarchy, patriarchy and hidden sexual violence of the country⁵²) the film finishes by reasserting homogenously pure nature, nostalgia for a past time and forms of labour, and a basic, country, ascetic life; the human superior to the zombie. This deferral by the film, on judging the common city/country motif, can also be seen in the indeterminacy of its central passages understood through the lens of its original ending in Jim's death. The new ending gives meaning in a clear way to the strivings and actions of the characters, as they are now rewarded with a hopeful and promising future as living, pure humans for their trials, but jars with the central motifs and structure of the film thus far.⁵³

'28 Days Later' can be used to explore contradictions apparent in the late capitalist culture industry and our participation in it. To Jameson's original thesis: that apocalyptic films are endemic to an imaginative and practical political failure, it is possible to add the schizophrenia of the late capitalist viewer (demanding hope and despair), the indeterminacy

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 202.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 203. Sigurdson, 'Slavoj Žižek, The Death Drive, and Zombies', *Modern Theology*, p. 369.

⁵¹ Jameson, 'Politics of Utopia', *New Left*, p. 48.

⁵² Ibid, p. 49.

⁵³ As Adorno says of the culture industry more generally: 'mass culture is not to be reproached for contradiction, any more than for its objective or non-objective character, but rather on account of the reconciliation which bars it from unfolding the contradiction into its truth.' Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, p. 81.

of the zombie, and the purity of a (non-capitalised) nature mediated through the technological apparatus of the screen.

Part Three: Liberation Theology and Zombies

The proceeding analysis leaves us with two interrelated issues to explore in the tradition of Liberation Theology. First, the questions posed by the lives of the zombies and the survivors, which I will relate to the concern in Liberation Theology with the interrelationship of the person and the non-person. Second, we need to reflect on the relationship of the person and the non-person with particular reference to the importance of the poor both substantially and methodologically in Liberation Theology; develop our understanding of how Liberation Theology's methodology is linked to its vision of the future. Substantially, Liberation Theologians like Gutiérrez have argued that the poor's cry for justice is an important example of God's praxis in history. The issue here is the relationship of salvation to liberation, or, alternatively, where is hope (for socialism, utopia or another future) to be located (in action, in inaction, in the city, in the country, etc.)? Methodologically, if the answer to the foregoing question is complex (an overlapping but non-identical relationship between salvation and liberation) then how can the praxis of the poor legitimately launch the project of Liberation Theology? First, I will consider the relationship of person and non-person in Liberation Theology.

Ivan Petrella says that 'the defining mark of the current global context is the spread of zones of social abandonment, or "Vitas", where those for whom the reigning social order finds no use are left to die.'⁵⁴ Drawing on the work of the anthropologist João Biehl, Petrella considers an area in Southern Brazil near Porto Alegre as a 'place in the world for populations of "ex-humans"'.⁵⁵ As not only a place but a practice, Vitas signify the contemporary processes of objectification which cause social and bodily death.⁵⁶ 'Vita' was instigated by a former street kid and drug dealer, Ze das Drogas, after he converted to Pentecostalism as a 'refuge where those like him could make their lives anew.'⁵⁷ But Petrella argues that this newness was lost as 'an increasing number of homeless, mentally ill, and dying persons began to be dumped there by the police, by psychiatric and general hospitals, by families and neighbours'.⁵⁸ Petrella

⁵⁴ Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ João Biehl quoted in Ibid, p. 9.

argues that to be dumped into a place like Vita is to be ‘socially dead; society declares you dead before your biological death. Insofar as you are socially dead yet biologically alive, you’ve overextended your lease on life. Your future is dead, yet you live on.’⁵⁹ For Petrella, Vita is one example among many of the idolatry of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The logic of objectification (reducing all things to malleable, tradable commodities) truncates the lives of the poor and inhibits the reconciliation of all of us with ourselves.⁶⁰ The non-person poor are both other and the same: simultaneously external and internal to the neoliberal capitalism mainstream. A similar line of social analysis can be found in first generation Liberation Theologians. Gutiérrez says that ‘the oppression of human beings certainly did not begin with the modern period, but in that period it has taken on a new modality.’⁶¹ The modality of modern oppression is an aspect of modern ‘liberation’ or the maximal freedom anthropology, its ‘underside’.⁶² The ‘non-persons, the poor of today’ occupy this underside as both the product of capitalist individualism and objectification, ‘a historical process of universal scope’, and as it forgotten, neglected or disavowed other.⁶³ The zombie can be understood as an illustration of the current location and global status of the poor in accord with a prominent line of socio-political analysis in Liberation Theology, and yet the zombie must also be rejected as an illuminating allegory.⁶⁴

The rejection of the zombie is necessary because, as Gutiérrez says, one of the defining characteristics of Liberation Theology is fidelity to the poor as oppressed and as Christians; ‘the people of Latin America are both exploited and Christian’.⁶⁵ What does this mean for our analysis? Here we come to the importance of the poor for the theological methodology of Liberation Theology. I am arguing that the zombie is both a symptom of late capitalist culture and a useful heuristic lens through which to nuance and advance the praxis of Liberation Theology. As a symptom of late capitalist contradiction, however, the zombie must be

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

⁶¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Orbis, 1990), p. 24.

⁶² Ibid, p. 24–25, 112–113.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 113.

⁶⁴ ‘Zombies are most decidedly a part of the proletariat’, Sigurdson, ‘Slavoj Žižek, The Death Drive, and Zombies’, *Modern Theology*, p. 369. See also Henry A. Giroux, ‘Zombie Politics and Other Late Modern Monstrosities in the Age of Disposability’, *Policy Future in Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2010), pp. 1–7. I have explored this issue in relation to the policy, practices, institutions and norms concerned with ‘social exclusion’ and contemporary British homelessness in Charles Pemberton, ‘Charity, Homelessness, and the Doctrine of Creation’ (PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2016).

⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, *Truth Shall Set you Free*, p. 115.

repudiated, for the zombie exists as a product of a cultural worldview in which there is no new, no interruption of history by either God or the poor ('the normal is murder'). In this sense, Zombie films depend on God's kingdom not being inaugurated historically in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as orthodox theology (Liberation or otherwise) testifies. Zombie history and salvation history are antithetical.⁶⁶

Gutiérrez says that for Liberation Theology 'our principle interlocutor has been non-persons insofar as they are considered as non-persons.'⁶⁷ He develops this point in *We Drink From Our Own Wells* through a double affirmation. One, that God makes a choice for the poor, and two, that Christian theology should therefore begin with the experience and spirituality of the poor as the poor know and disclose something of particular importance about the Christian God.⁶⁸ We can synthesise these two points by saying that the poor's call for justice is an experience of the act of God.⁶⁹ Gutiérrez's understanding of the coincidence of God's praxis with the poor's praxis is why he argues that 'theology is the second step', it draws on the experience of the poor and solidarity of the theologian with the poor in their mutual search for justice.⁷⁰ The praxis of the poor is a chapter in the history of salvation, and Gutiérrez argues in *A Theology of Liberation* that it is the fuller (but not complete) coincidence of socialism with salvation history (both better protect and embody life for all) that grounds the theological desirability of socialism and his rejection of capitalism.⁷¹ In his most famous work, Gutiérrez says

The eschatological promises are being fulfilled throughout history, but this does not mean that they can be identified clearly and completely with one or another social reality; their liberating effect goes far beyond the foreseeable and opens up new and unsuspected possibilities. The complete encounter with the Lord will mark an end to history, but it will take place in history. Thus we must acknowledge historical events in all their concreteness and significance, but we are also led to a permanent detachment.⁷²

⁶⁶ In Gutiérrez's words: 'death and injustice are not the final word of history.' Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: SCM Press, 1984), p. 1.

⁶⁷ Gutiérrez, *Truth Shall Set you Free*, p. 23, 24.

⁶⁸ Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells* p. 11.

⁶⁹ It is important to note here that Gutiérrez's work builds on an understanding of theology as witness: a discipline which, at its best, is marked by inquisitiveness and faithfulness. This can of course be justifiably questioned. See the introduction of *We Drink From Our Own Wells* for a clear statement by Gutiérrez to this effect. *Ibid*, p. 1-5.

⁷⁰ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, p. 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 111–113, 149-187.

⁷² Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, p. 168.

However, despite Gutiérrez's careful qualifications and theological sophistication, the question still persists: how can the theological community raise the lives and voices of the poor as the pre-eminent theological site without also nailing the poor to their poverty? Is it possible to idealise the poor as a part of a well-meaning discourse, but one that ultimately renders the poor a historical and theological necessity, thus inadvertently disincentivising liberation? How, second, are we to differentiate between the poor's call for justice and the poor's call for inclusion; the non-identity of the poor's lives and God's historical praxis. In the words of Jameson, is it not the case that 'the utopian fantasies of the poor and disadvantaged are as ideological and as laden with *ressentiment* as those of the masters and the privileged'?⁷³ Third, if it is no longer possible to image socialism, then what is the socio-political end towards which the theological community and the poor should aim? And, if we do not know where we should go, how are we to know what we should do?

For Petrella, the two key obstacles for the first generation of Liberation Theologians are both related to the place of praxis in their methodology.⁷⁴ Petrella argues that the hiatus between the second step social sciences and the third step theological in the four step theology favoured by the first generation of liberationists obstructed Liberation Theology from realising its explicit goals: the instigation of emancipatory historical projects. Petrella says that 'this restriction of the social sciences and delimitation of theology functions to enshrine liberation theology's inability to construct historical projects as good theology'.⁷⁵ Because the social

⁷³ Jameson, 'Politics of Utopia', *New Left*, p. 50.

⁷⁴ Petrella identifies the 'canonical' methodology with a 'four step' process that involves: 1. Praxis of and with the poor. 2. Socio-political analysis. 3. Theological stage of critical reflection. 4. Return to political praxis. Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, p. 24–46. For 'praxis' in these relative theologians see José Míguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 37–53. Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1987). Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (New York: Orbis, 2011), p. 22–28. Clodovis Boff, 'Method of the Theology of Liberation', trans. Robert R. Barr, in. Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, eds., *Systematic Theology* (New York, Maryknoll, 1993), pp. 1–21. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (New York: Orbis, 1976), p. 66–97. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda, John Eagleson (New York: Orbis, 1983), p. 3–19. This paragraph and the next repeat aspects of the analysis laid out in chapter three of my PhD. See Charles Pemberton, 'Charity, Homelessness, and the Doctrine of Creation' (PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2016).

⁷⁵ Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, p. viii. Daniel M. Bell goes further than this, rather than see the social sciences/theology as distinct but related disciplines, Bell argues that the first generation of Liberation Theologians 'have acquiesced to the separation of religion from the socio-political-economic spheres of life, which entails depriving the Church of a forthright political presence, and have turned to the state as the principle agent of resistance to the capitalist order', meaning: they advocate 'an apolitical Church'. While Bell is like Petrella in his conclusion that the project of Liberation Theology as it was originally articulated, has been stifled, and I have already draw on some of his analysis in this paper, I think these further claims by Bell are, at the least,

sciences are not to contribute to theology proper, and are thus only of limited normative or theological use, Petrella argues that their ability to help shape a theologically legitimate future and the reforms necessary to achieve this are truncated.⁷⁶ According to Petrella, this leads the theologian to ‘argue for broad lines of change’ related to theological injunctions but also functions to arrest the Liberation Theologian from identifying specific, isolated political programs or actions as theologically desirable.⁷⁷ This point is debatable, for the metaphor of ‘steps’ as a guide to theological methodology is complimented in Gutiérrez’s work, for example, by the illustration of method as a hermeneutical circle, in which orthodoxy and orthopraxis exist in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship.⁷⁸

There is a second aspect to praxis, which Petrella notes, and that is the significant and recurrent political utopia to which almost all of the first generation of Liberation Theologians ascribed, socialism. However, the contemporary possibility of socialism brings to the fore historical changes in the socio-political context in which Liberation Theology now occurs, particularly the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the upsurge of culture as a contested site, and the ‘there is no alternative’ end of history thesis and experience.⁷⁹ Petrella sees the ‘end of history’ as problematic for South American, first generation, Liberation Theology’s canonical method in a twofold sense: first, without a plausible *telos*, the choice of a form of praxis in which to ground and hold to account the production of theology is rendered indeterminate. Which kind of action are we to begin with – with the action of a political party, with charity, with local community organising or with LGBT representation, for example?⁸⁰ And, by what

insensitive to the real gains, impact and intentions of these early Liberation Theologians, especially considering his endorsement of the BASE communities only one page earlier. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, p. 43, 44.

⁷⁶ On the compartmentalisation of theology and the social sciences see Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 58, 61, 62. For another example of this delineation, see Bonino, *Christian Political Ethics*, p. 43. Petrella, *Future of Liberation*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ Petrella, *Future of Liberation*, p. 28.

⁷⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 10. Gutiérrez says that ‘to believe (life) and to understand (reflection) are always part of a circular relationship... orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other.’ Gutiérrez, quoted in <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/gillingham-Gutiérrez.shtml>. Accessed 20/07/2014.

⁷⁹ With the fall of real existing socialism, Francis Fukuyama argued that we have come to the end of historical progress, neoliberal capitalism is the only political order left available to us practically or imaginatively. A position he later renounced. See: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012) and Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2002). Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 26. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, p. 74.

⁸⁰ The following literature picks up on limitations, and potential, of these respective forms of political and theological action. Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008). Slavoj Žižek, John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectics?* (London: MIT Press, 2009),

criteria are we to judge between these possibilities when praxis, in the first generation of Liberation Theologians' work, was a means for the development of theological discernment? If the point of departure is opaque, Liberation Theology faces the further problem of drawing a variety of actors – the poor, the church, and the state apparatus – towards a definite goal, the instigation of a socialist society, if this is no longer imaginatively viable. Furthermore, for Petrella, early Liberation Theology presented 'a picture of the causes of oppression in which they are of such magnitude that they seem practically insurmountable' thus, 'given the intractable conditions of oppression, paralysis ensues.'⁸¹

The path that Petrella proposes compromises idolatry critique, the construction of historical projects, mapping and criticism, and a form of immanent critique which asks whether particular and delineated institutions embody their stated ideals.⁸² However, is it the case that in Petrella's sundering of himself from the theological, he inadvertently accepts the fundamental horizon of 'TINA'?⁸³ Petrella proposes no radically alternative future, transcendent value or norm, and no theological exterior from which to launch, inform or develop his critique of contemporary capitalism.

Like Petrella, Daniel Bell also concludes that Liberation Theology is insufficiently radical but unlike Petrella he argues that it is the complicity of Liberation Theology in state led social engineering (governmentality) that has bastardised it. In this instance, the solution is not the further elision of theology and the social sciences (as Petrella argues) or the Christian

p. 200. John Milbank, *The Future of Love* (London: SCM Press, 2009), p. 197–207. Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007). Chris Shannahan, *A Theology of Community Organising: Power to the People* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁸¹ Petrella, *Beyond Liberation*, p. 101. Petrella's analysis can help us to illuminate the mixed current status of Liberation Theology in the British context. On the one hand, Liberation Theology was very popular in the UK during the 1980s, around the time of the publication of the Church of England's *Faith in the City*. According to Malcolm Brown, it was the association of Liberation Theology with *Faith in the City* that lead a conservative minister to lambaste *Faith in the City* as 'pure Marxist theology'; and the book itself, given such an outstanding and unusual commendation, to go on and become a (theological) best seller. Malcolm Brown's assessment of Liberation Theology now, however, is it that 'if not a blind alley' it did in retrospect constitute a 'rather unpromising turn'. His assessment is qualified, by reference to British ecclesiological conditions in the UK, and late twentieth century American foreign policy in relation to South America, but it is interesting in its suggestion that Liberation Theology, while promising much, was unhelpful in formulating renewed forms of political and ecclesiological praxis. It promised something, but led nowhere; leaving 'socially active Christians... almost naked.' Malcolm Brown, eds., *Anglican Social Theology* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), p. 10, 11.

⁸² Petrella, *Future of Liberation Theology*, p. 39, 40, 104.

⁸³ The separation of the 'theological' from the 'liberative' is clearly stated in the 'Coda' to Petrella's *Beyond Liberation Theology*. Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, p. 148-150.

church and state but the selective withdrawal of the church and the discipline of theology from their current obsession with rights discourse and conflictual accounts of justice (in favour of the church fulfilling its true calling: to be the true polis, the real church).⁸⁴ For Bell Christianity and capitalism vie as alternative technologies of desire, consequently he lends himself to the extended articulation of their counter-veining tendencies.⁸⁵ Using forgiveness as a designator of God's saving works and the central defining characteristic of the church's identity (as opposed to justice) and then counterpoising them to neoliberal capitalism is undoubtedly an interesting and sophisticated move by Bell. However, like Petrella, Bell's defence of the 'refusal to cease suffering' is itself insufficiently complex for our current situation.⁸⁶ The driving force of Liberation Theology is both the refusal to cease suffering (the solidarity of the theologian with the non-person) and the refusal of suffering (the poor's call for justice). If one of these elements is denied, degraded or downplayed the double prompt that Gutiérrez identifies as the engine of Liberation Theology has been lost. My reading of Jameson and Boyle's film '28 Days Later' only heightens the insufficiency of Bell's position, for contemporary capitalism functions by offering non-commodified or alternative positions as a means for maintaining and reproducing its hegemony. To Bell it must be stated: to defend the difference of the church on the grounds of its exteriority is currently particularly dangerous because it is analogous to the modality of contemporary capitalist logics of power. My position can be differentiated from Petrella and Bells' in this way: Petrella thinks with the grain of the modern democratic tradition and conscientiously separates himself from the theological; Bell refuses the thrust of the modern rights tradition in order to more fully realise in the contemporary world the heritage of the Christian tradition. Gutiérrez, in contrast to both of these figures, argues that God acted in the premodern world and that S/he continues to act in the modern world too. For Gutiérrez it is in the tactical and theologically informed co-ordination of aspects of pre-modern theology and modern liberative politics which points the way towards the future.

⁸⁴ Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, p. 141, 142, 151.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 144.

⁸⁶ Bell does later re-introduce 'justice' into the argument, justice after forgiveness which is full and non-violent justice. Arguably this move is consonant with the complex and contradictory form of Liberation Theology that this paper is exploring. However, Bell attempts no comparable re-integration of either the economy or the state (the key spheres he argues are defined by concepts of justice at variance with the Christian tradition of forgiveness) and his account of theo-political theology is, on these grounds, still significantly lacking. See Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, p. 186, 187.

Conclusion

In the 'The Politics of Utopia', Jameson argues that 'no matter how comprehensive and trans-class or post-ideological the inventory of reality's flaws and defects, the imaginary resolution necessarily remains wedded to this or that ideological perspective'.⁸⁷ Jameson says that we are mired in class, and faced with contradictory oppositions (person - non-person, nature - technology, action - inaction) we should, to proceed, assume a 'stubbornly negative relationship to both' aspects of the contradiction.⁸⁸ Jameson insists that we persist in asserting that 'the value of each [utopian] term is differential, it lies not in its own substantive content but as an ideological critique of its opposite number.'⁸⁹ He continues: 'the truth of the vision of nature lies in the way in which it discloses the complacency of the urban celebration; but the opposite is also true, and the vision of the city exposes everything nostalgic and impoverished in the embrace of nature.'⁹⁰

This negative model proposed by Jameson cannot be called upon to answer, in any immediate way, the diverse possible methods of Liberation Theology. Nor, as Jameson goes onto argue, does it surmount our collective stasis and fear of the discontinuation of our current order. However, it does hold open the door to a generous interpretation of the transition we see in one Liberation Theologian's life and work. The methodological reflections we find on praxis as the beginning of Liberation Theology are developed during the course of Gutiérrez's life. In the 1973 translation of *A Theology of Liberation* Gutiérrez says that Liberation Theology (as it would come to be known) is 'critical reflection on historical praxis... a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of mankind.'⁹¹ This 'liberating transformation' includes, Gutiérrez tells us, 'the present', for 'in the praxis of liberation, in its deepest dimension, [the present] is pregnant with the future; hope must be an inherent part of our present commitment in history.'⁹² However, in the theoretical terms developed in this paper, beginning with praxis is problematic in a number of ways: because praxis has become inertia, because we cannot imagine a new political praxis, because even 'hope' is being deployed against us as a means for the atrophying of our commitment to history and the future, because the poor too can become complicit in reactionary praxis. Yet, by the time Gutiérrez comes to

⁸⁷ Jameson, 'Politics of Utopia', *New Left*, p. 47.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁹¹ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 15.

⁹² Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 14.

write *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, he is still saying that ‘discourse of faith is a second stage in relation to the life of faith itself’ but reflects on this departure point, ‘life’, in a different way. He says, now, that ‘talk about God (theo-logy) comes after the silence of prayer and after commitment’, for it is a praxis ‘enriched by silence’.⁹³ For Gutiérrez ‘authentic theological reflection has its basis in contemplation *and* in practice.’⁹⁴

Read with Jameson, theological methodology (if it wishes to be) informed by the developments that have been seen in the diverse field of Liberation Theology must seek to hold open both the moment of action and the moment of reflection as integral to both politics and theology in this time of progressive regression. Beginning in action and reflection allows me to answer a number of the questions that I posed to Gutiérrez earlier in this paper. Are the poor a historical and theological necessity because of Gutiérrez’s methodological commitments? No. For Gutiérrez, Liberation Theology begins in commitment and silence and it is therefore viable to postulate a Liberation Theology done after the end of poverty. Second, is the ‘end of history’ also the ‘first generation of Liberation Theology’? No it is not, because socialism and God’s Kingdom are overlapping but non-identical realities for authors like Gutiérrez. We should push this point even further and insist that even the realisation of a socialist utopia would not be the end of this model of theology, for Gutiérrez advocates the practice of detachment and critique and prioritises fidelity to a timeless and unchanging God, revealed historically in the person of Jesus Christ, before any social order.

Lash says that ‘clear-sightedness demands that we admit that, as things at present stand, there seems no chance of bringing off, within the necessary time-scale, those comprehensive transformations of heart, and will, and institutions, that the healing of the world requires’.⁹⁵ From this paper it is possible to add to Lash’s observation this point: the recognition that the stasis from which we need to be ‘transformed’ is often experienced as frenetic activity and perennial change. This paper has developed a particular line of diagnosis of our current malady informed by Boyle’s film ‘28 Days later’ and has concluded by suggesting that faced by our current contradictions it behoves the church and the theologian to cleave to praxis and contemplation in their tension. To commit time to God and to God’s people, which means: to commit time to no-thing and to non-people (for, as Nicholas Lash never tires of saying, God is

⁹³ Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, p. 136.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 136. My emphasis.

⁹⁵ Lash, *Beginning and End of ‘Religion’*, p. 256.

no-thing, and the Liberation Theologians equally tell us that the poor are non-people), will be one of the marks of this theology; a theology that continues to struggle for liberation.⁹⁶

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⁹⁶ See, Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2008). Strategically, this theo-political vision is comparable with aspects of the 'Bartlebian' politics of refusal advocated by Žižek, as it will also value the power of refusal, of saying 'no'. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2008).

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